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ABSTRACT

Because parents of upper elementary school students are less likely to attend school conferences, reading teachers at this level must find unique ways to communicate with the home. Techniques for improving communication include the following: (1) holding workshops at the start of the school year to explain classroom goals and procedures, (2) presenting student skits or plays during parent-school meetings to improve attendance, (3) writing short letters suggesting how parents can stimulate skills developed in the classroom, (4) assigning student letters telling parents what they are doing in school, (5) extending specific invitations to parents to visit the school, (6) sending "happy grams" telling parents when their child has done something special, (7) telephoning rather than writing parents about a serious problem, and (8) extending invitations to parents to observe classes at specific times of the year. (MM)

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PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION: PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
ON HOW TO EFFECTIVELY BEGIN THE PROCESS

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During the past ten years an increasingly large number of teachers have become aware of the fact that parents play an important role in their child's development. This is particularly true in the field of reading. No longer do teachers have the attitude that parents should stay away from the schools. Instead teachers, realizing the importance of a parent-teacher partnership, are searching for innovative ways to communicate with and involve parents. In a Johns Hopkins study, Epstein and Becker found that first grade teachers solicit parents' help more than at any level. Of the teachers included in the study, 85% of first grade teachers requested that the parent read with their child. This decreased to 65% at the third grade level and 40% at the fifth grade level. Likewise, first grade teachers seem to be more cognizant of the fact that parents can help their child learn concepts through games and activities. Results of the study showed that 35% of the first grade teachers requested or recommended that parents use the home environment to teach concepts through games or other informal learning activities. Similar recommendations were made by 25% of the third grade teachers and 20% of the fifth grade teachers in the study. Likewise, it seems that parents are equally anxious to work with the teacher for the sake of improving their child's reading ability. The majority of parents are interested in helping their child. In the same study, results showed that 60% of the parents adhered to requests to read to their child regardless of their educational level.

In summary, in recent years both parents and teachers seem to be increasingly aware of the need for collaboration. It seems that teachers of the first grade level are able to lend more support to these programs than teachers at the upper elementary levels. It may be that teachers of students in the later elementary school years find it increasingly difficult

to communicate with parents because at this age level parents are less likely to visit or attend the school. These teachers must find unique ways to communicate with parents. It seems that the desire for communication is present with both parent and teacher. What teachers may need are some practical suggestions on how to effectively begin the process. The following tips should give teachers ideas to help develop better communication techniques.

1. Workshops - Before planning a workshop, send home a questionnaire in an effort to establish an appropriate time and day. Find out if car pool arrangements can be made or if child care need to be provided. Workshops are particularly effective at the beginning of the year. During this time teachers can tell parents their future plans and what will be included in the curriculum. Also, they can explain to parents the general set-up of the classroom and homework assignments and ways that the teacher will be communicating with the parent in the future.
2. Student Participation - Involving the child as well as the parent is one way of increasing attendance at school functions. The teacher may have the child perform in a skit or short play. Parents are more likely to come out to see their child perform than they are if the child is not included.
3. Communication letter - A communication letter can be particularly effective if the following rules are incorporated. Make certain that the communication letter is not too long. A one page letter will be read more often than a letter containing two or three pages. Include specific suggestions on how the parent may use activities to stimulate such areas as language development, sight words, comprehension, and word attack skills.

4. Student writing home - So often when children come home, parents ask them what they have done in school. The response is usually "nothing." By incorporating the letter into the Language Arts program, teachers can effectively communicate to parents through the child. By the teacher giving the child specific guidelines to follow and specific questions to answer the child has some framework in which he can communicate classroom life to his parents. Teachers can give parents specific guidelines to follow after receiving the letter. For example, parents can help the child with misspelled words and do follow-up activities.
5. Inviting parents - Parents will be more likely to visit the school if they have a specific invitation to do so. Encourage parents to help with a project or tutor a particular child, particularly their own. Have the class create a special invitation as part of an art or writing lesson.
6. Special awards and happy grams - When children do something special, they like to receive an award or recognition. A simple happy gram can work wonders and also serve as a communicating device to the parent. Parents like to know when their child has done something special, as well as when he needs to be reprimanded.
7. Try telephoning - Telephones have been our means of communication for a number of years. For parents who are working or have a difficult time getting to the school, this is a particularly effective measure. Explaining to the parent directly what the problem is can be much more effective than through written communication. This is particularly true if the problem is serious. Words can often be misinterpreted

in written communication. When teacher and parent are talking directly, there is less likely a chance of that happening. Parents will appreciate the teacher making a special effort to make direct contact with them.

8. Newspapers - Don't forget your local newspaper when trying to figure out how you can communicate with parents. Most parents read the newspaper or at least get it in their home and would read it if they thought there was a column particularly pertaining to their child. Work load can be divided among the teachers so as not to create an undue burden on one teacher. For example, if the column ran monthly, then each grade level could be responsible for one month during the year. Several teachers could get together and offer parents specific suggestions that they could implement that would be particularly effective for that age level child. Another device is to have a publicity chairman that is responsible for making certain that school happenings are publicized. One classroom or grade level could be the feature for each week. It is important for the parents to know what the schools are doing and this is an excellent way for schools to communicate this to parents.
9. Open invitation - Periodically throughout the year the teacher could send an open invitation to all parents to observe the reading program. Children may write the open invitation letter themselves or parents or teachers could write the invitation and send it to the parent by way of the child. If parents have an open invitation, they are more likely to come to the school than if they have not received one.

10. Borrowing material - Encourage the parents to borrow material either from your classroom, another classroom or from the resource room. Parents can use the material in many cases most effectively. This helps by making more use out of the material, and by including parents in the educational process of their own child.

These practical suggestions will help teachers develop communication with parents. Parents desire to know more about why particular methods are being used, their child's reading progress, and what teachers are doing. Teachers need to know what problems parents are having and offer them suggestions to help alleviate these problems. Start on-going communication today by using one of these suggestions!